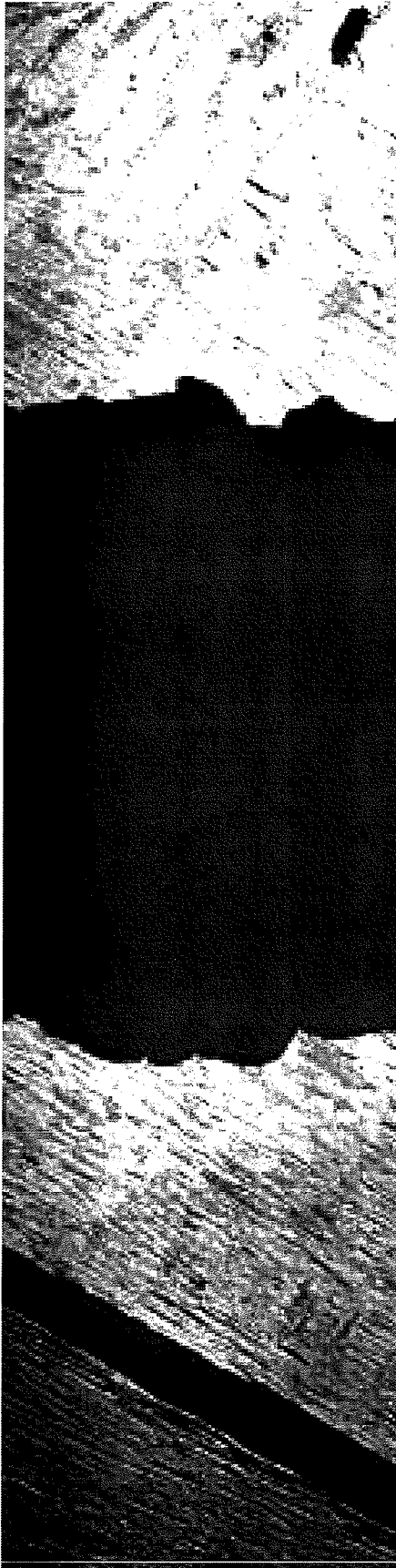


by Edgar Allan Poe, adapted by Sue Ellis



**Warning: This tale may
cause nightmares.**

Read it at your own risk.

Connect to Your Life

What was the last tale you heard or read that sent a tingle down your spine? What things help to make horror stories and movies scary?

Key to the Horror Story

Something is wrong with the narrator, or teller of this story. Pay close attention to the details he gives. Look for clues in the way he behaves. You may find out something that he doesn't want you to know.

Vocabulary Preview

Words to Know

vulture	mortal
cautious	precisely



Reading Coach CD-ROM selection

FOCUS

The narrator wants to explain something about himself. Find out what it is.

True! Nervous—very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am! But why will you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses. It did not destroy them or make them dull. Above all, my sense of hearing was **acute**! I heard all things in heaven and in the earth. How then am I mad? Listen! Observe how calmly I tell you the whole story.

acute
(ə kyōōt')
sharp

It is impossible to say how I first got the idea. But
10 once I did, it haunted me day and night. I had no reason. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never insulted me. I didn't want his gold. I think it was his eye. Yes, it was his eye! He had the eye of a **vulture**—a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it looked at me, my blood ran cold. And so, very gradually, I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and get rid of the eye forever.

vulture
(vŭl' cher)
n. bird that eats dead things

THINK IT THROUGH

What does the narrator want to do? Why?

FOCUS

The narrator tries to carry out his plans. Read to find out what happens.

Now this is the point. You think I'm mad. Madmen
20 know nothing. But you should have seen me. You should have seen how wisely I went about my work.

I was so careful! I showed such foresight! I was so **cautious**!

cautious

(kô' shəs)

adj. very careful

I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him.

Every night, about midnight, I turned the latch of his door and opened it—oh, so gently! Then when I opened it just enough for my head, I would put in a lantern. The lantern showed no light; its sides were
30 closed. I moved it slowly, very slowly, so that I might not disturb the old man's sleep. It took me an hour to place my whole head within the opening so far that I could see him as he lay upon his bed.

And then, so cautiously—cautiously (for the hinges creaked)—I would open the lantern. One single thin ray of light from the lantern would fall on the old man's vulture eye. I did this for seven long nights—every night at midnight—but the eye was always closed. So it was
40 impossible to do my work; for it was not the old man who annoyed me, but his Evil Eye.

REREAD

Try to picture this scene in your mind. Why couldn't the narrator kill the old man?

And every morning, when the day broke, I went boldly into his room. I spoke bravely to him, calling him by name in a hearty tone, **inquiring** how he had spent the night. He had no reason to suspect that I had been looking in on him while he slept.

inquiring

(Yn kwī' rĭng)

asking

On the eighth night I was even more cautious in
50 opening the door. The minute hand of the watch moves more quickly than mine did. Never before that night had I felt my own power and wisdom. I could scarcely contain my feelings of triumph. There I was, opening the door little by little, and he was not aware of me. Perhaps he heard me, for he moved on the bed

suddenly, as if startled. Now you may think that I drew back—but no. His room was as black as pitch with the thick darkness (for the shutters were closed, through fear of robbers). So I knew that he could not
60 see the door opening, and I kept pushing it, steadily, steadily.

I had my head in, and was about to open the lantern, when my thumb slipped on the side of the lantern, and the old man sprang up in the bed, crying out, “Who’s there?”

I kept quite still and said nothing. For a whole hour I did not move a muscle, and in the meantime I did not hear him lie down. He was still sitting up in the bed listening. Presently I heard a slight groan, and I
70 knew it was the groan of **mortal** terror. It was the sound of fear—from the bottom of the soul. I knew it well myself. Many a night I have felt those same terrors. I knew what the old man felt, and pitied him, although I chuckled in my heart. I knew that he had been lying awake ever since the first slight noise, when he had turned in the bed. His fears had been continuing to grow upon him. He had been trying to talk himself out of them, but he could not. He could
80 feel—although he could not see or hear it—my head’s presence in his room.

mortal

(môr’ tl)

adj. extreme;
almost
threatening death

THINK IT THROUGH

What happens on the eighth night? How is it different from the first seven nights?

FOCUS

The narrator hears something. How does this sound affect what he does?

When I had waited a long time, very patiently, without hearing him lie down, I decided to open a little—a very, very little—crack in the lantern. So I opened it—you cannot imagine how carefully—until a single dim ray, like the thread of the spider, shot out from the crack and fell **precisely** upon the vulture eye.

precisely

(prĭ sīs' lē)

adv. exactly

It was open—wide, wide open—and I
90 grew furious as I gazed upon it. I saw it perfectly clearly—all a dull blue. It had a **hideous veil** over it that chilled the very

hideous veil

(hĭd' ē əs vāl')

ugly covering

center of my bones. But I could see nothing of the old man's face or body, for I had directed the ray as if by instinct, precisely on that eye.

100 And now have I not told you that what you mistake for madness is only the extreme sharpness of my senses? Now, I say, there came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound, such as a ticking clock makes when covered in cotton. I knew that sound too well too. It was the beating of the old man's heart.

REREAD
How is the sound of the clock like the sound of the old man's heart?

110 But even yet I kept still. I scarcely breathed. I held the lantern motionless. I tried to see how steadily I could keep the ray upon the eye. Meanwhile the awful drumming of the heart increased. It grew quicker and quicker, and louder and louder every instant. The old man's terror must have been extreme! It grew louder, I say, louder every moment!—do you hear me well? I have told you that I am nervous: so I am. And now at the dead hour of night, amid the awful silence of that old house, this strange noise began to terrify me. Yet, for some minutes longer I stood still. But the beating grew louder, louder! I thought the heart must burst. And

120 now a new fear seized me—the sound would be heard by a neighbor! The old man's hour had come! With a loud yell, I threw open the lantern and leaped into the room. He shrieked once—once only. In an instant I dragged him to the floor, and pulled the heavy bed over him. But for many minutes, the heart beat

REREAD
What causes the narrator to carry out his deed?

on with a muffled sound. This, however, did not worry me; it would not be heard through the wall. Finally it stopped. The old man was dead. I removed the bed and looked at the corpse. Yes, he was stone,

stone dead. I placed my hand upon the heart and held it there many minutes. There was no beating. He was stone dead. His eye would trouble me no more.

130 If you still think me mad, you will think so no longer when I describe how I hid the body. The night was ending, and I worked fast but in silence. First I cut up the corpse. I cut off the head and the arms and the legs. I then took up three boards from the floor of the room and hid the body parts. Then I replaced the boards so cleverly and carefully that no human eye—not even *his*—could have noticed anything wrong. There was nothing to wash out—no stain of any kind, not even blood. I had been too cautious for that. A
140 tub had caught all—ha, ha!

THINK IT THROUGH

What does the narrator do? How does he feel about it?

FOCUS

The police arrive. Read to find out how the narrator covers up his crime.

When I ended my work, it was four o'clock—still dark as midnight. As the bell sounded the hour, there came a knocking at the street door. I went down to open it with a light heart—for what had I now to fear? Three men entered who introduced themselves as police officers. A shriek had been heard by a neighbor during the night. The neighbor had called the police, and they had come to search the house.

I smiled—for what had I to fear? I welcomed the
150 gentlemen. The shriek, I said, was my own in a dream. The old man, I mentioned, had gone to the

country. I took my visitors all over the house. I told them to search—search well. I led them, finally, to his room. I felt so confident that I brought chairs into the room and told them to rest here. I myself boldly put my chair upon the very spot under which I'd buried the corpse of the victim.

THINK IT THROUGH

How does the narrator react when the police arrive? How do you explain this reaction?

FOCUS

Something unexpected happens. Read to discover what the narrator reveals.

The officers were satisfied. My manner had convinced them. I was totally at ease. They sat, and while I answered cheerily, they chatted. But soon, I felt myself getting pale and wished they were gone. My head ached, and I heard a ringing in my ears: but still they sat and still chatted. The ringing became more **distinct**; it continued and became more distinct. I talked more freely to get rid of the feeling, but it continued and got clearer—until, finally, I found that the noise was not within my ears.

distinct
(dĭ stĭngkt')
clear

I now grew very pale; but I talked faster and louder. Yet the sound increased—and what could I do? It was *a low, dull, quick sound—much like a ticking clock sounds when covered in cotton.*

REREAD

Where has the narrator used these words before?

I gasped for breath—and yet the officers didn't hear it. I talked more quickly, more emotionally; but the noise steadily increased. Why wouldn't they leave? I paced the floor, as if excited by

the conversation—but the noise kept increasing. What could I do? I foamed—I raged—I swore. I swung my
180 chair and scraped it on the boards, but the noise arose again and continually increased. It grew louder—louder—louder! And still the men chatted pleasantly and smiled. Was it possible that they didn't hear it? No, no! they heard!—they suspected—they knew! They were laughing at my horror! This I thought and this I think. But anything was better than this agony. I could not bear those smiles any longer! I felt that I must scream or die—and now—again—listen! louder! louder!—
190 “Villains!” I shrieked. “Pretend no more! I admit the deed!—Tear up the planks—here, here! It is the beating of his hideous heart!”

THINK IT THROUGH

1. What does the narrator end up telling the police?
2. What may have caused him to tell them this? Explain.
3. Do you think the heart was really beating at the end? Explain your answer.
4. How does the narrator show that he's mad? Use details from the story to support your answer.